

Building Partnerships

Outline

Creative Partnerships projects involve the building of partnerships between schools, creative professionals and young people. This case study shares the experience of three schools (two primary and one further education college) and their understanding of the key elements of building successful partnerships; the conditions that allow effective partnership working; the tools needed to facilitate this and advice for schools and partners new to partnership practice.

Introduction

This case study on the theme of building partnerships looks at recent Creative Partnerships London East and South projects at Millennium Primary School in Greenwich, Thomas Buxton Junior School in Tower Hamlets and City and Islington College in Islington. All three schools have worked with Creative Partnerships for a number of years. Though the contexts for the three projects, the aims and objectives, the approaches to partnership working and outcomes were very different, the enthusiasm for partnership working among the 30 individuals interviewed for this case study was inspiring.

Millennium Primary School opened in 2001 as part of the Greenwich Peninsula regeneration project, replacing a smaller, older school. A January 2006 Ofsted inspection report describes it as an inner city primary school of above average size with 286 pupils. Millennium Primary School opened with 230 pupils, including many children with special needs; it will double in size to 460 pupils by September 2009. Several of the school's Creative Partnerships projects have been developed to respond to the challenges of moving into the new, much larger building with its increased and increasing capacity. By involving parents, carers and guardians, projects have helped to establish the new school community and to publicly highlight what is valued in the school.



For its 2006/07 Creative Partnerships Catalyst project Starting School – Memories and Desires, Millennium Primary School worked with three partners to focus on early years pupils with the aim of developing an understanding of how starting school is a significant event in the lives of children and adults. These were composer and music animator John Webb, textile artists from Cloth of Gold, an organisation that specialises in running collaborative arts projects and practitioners specialising in reminiscence-based creative activities from Age Exchange.

Thomas Buxton Junior School in Tower Hamlets has 198 pupils. Its March 2007 Ofsted inspection report describes it as serving an area of significant social and economic deprivation with almost all of the pupils of Bangladeshi origin speaking English as an additional language. The school has experienced a turbulent four years with several headteachers and major building work.

With the aim of promoting community cohesion and encouraging young people to become interested in their neighbours, Thomas Buxton Junior School worked in partnership with its adjoining infant school and nearby St Anne's Roman Catholic Primary School on a project led by Half Moon Young People's Theatre. Previous Thomas Buxton work has involved a whole school drumming project, a story telling project and in 2005/06 the Look At Me project with photographer Stephanie Gill that focused on improving the transition process for pupils moving from the infant school into the junior school, by using photography to explore their identity and environment.

City and Islington College has over 21,000 students of which approximately 89% are from areas of socio-economic deprivation and approximately 43% from ethnic minority groups. A November 2004 Ofsted report and the Adult Learning Inspectorate assessed 90% of the college's grades as outstanding or good. The college's new Centre for Business, Arts and Technology that opened in January 2006, has a good track record of providing a broad range of high quality courses from entry level to foundation degree.

Four performance groups – theatre, music and young men and women's dance – within the performing arts department worked in partnership to develop a collaborative project called Turbulence. With the aim of establishing an identity and achieving greater sustainability for each of the groups of young artists, they worked with Artsadmin to develop skills in strategic planning, fundraising and marketing. The college also worked with: Denzil Barnes, Dancer; Neill Brinkworth, Lighting Designer; Lucy Steggals, Designer and Gary Beestone, Production Manager from Giraffe Productions on realising aspects of the production but it is the partnership with Artsadmin that the case study will focus on.

In exploring the projects at Millennium and Thomas Buxton Primary Schools and City and Islington College, this case study will identify the characteristics common to successful partnerships, the conditions that promote effective partnership working and the tools that can facilitate this process. The case study will include advice from the schools and creative partners to others embarking on partnership working and aims to articulate a definition of good practice.



The Projects

The catalyst for Millennium Primary School's project was foundation stage teacher and Creative Partnerships coordinator Sarah Davies' work with John Webb on an action research project through the Teacher Artist Partnership Programme¹, a year long training programme for teachers and artists exploring approaches to learning and teaching through the experience and practice of the performing arts.

The partners met in December 2006 to design the two strands of the Starting School project that began in January 2007. The aim of the first strand was to develop a child-initiated project for early years pupils. John worked with about 40 pupils from nursery and reception classes in weekly morning sessions over four weeks. Sarah Pimenta from Cloth of Gold assisted by a trainee artist and a parent also led banner-printing workshops with the children on the theme of starting school. The work culminated in a final sharing about starting school for parents and year 6 pupils held in the school hall in March, with the banners hung permanently in classrooms to encourage children to reflect on the experience of starting school.

The second strand of the project involved creative workshops for parents, carers and guardians of early years pupils with the aim of engaging them as their children started at the school, as well as providing opportunities for them to get to know each other. About 18 adults who had started school in a variety of countries participated in two 90 minute workshops where they were encouraged to share photographs and their own experiences of starting school and talk about their concerns and aspirations for their children at the start of their school careers. These sessions were led by Tony McTurk and David Rowan of Age Exchange. Anna Ferrie and Sarah Pimenta from Cloth of Gold also led two 90 minute printmaking workshops for the adults with participants creating textile pieces reflecting their own and their children's experiences of starting school. These pieces included banners and cushion fabric that formed a display in the school's early years corridor. In the final session parents listened to a recording of their reminiscences compiled by John Webb, shared the artwork that had been produced and reflected upon the workshops and the final celebration involving the children.

1. Teacher Artist Partnership Programme is a part-time professional development programme for artists and teachers accredited by the Institute of Education, London (www.tapprogramme.org)



Age Exchange also led a 75-minute twilight reminiscence workshop for 15 teachers and early years staff that provided an introduction to and encouraged wider engagement with the project.

Thomas Buxton Junior School's project titled *Who's Over There?* focused on the theme of promoting community cohesion and encouraging young people to become interested in who their neighbours are. To achieve this, the junior school worked in partnership with its neighbouring schools, Thomas Buxton Infant School and St Anne's RC Primary School. Although the three schools are in close geographic proximity, they reflect very different cultures: the Thomas Buxton schools largely comprise Bangladeshi, Sylheti speaking Muslim children while St Anne's pupils are mainly English speaking Roman Catholics with a significant number of Brazilian children who speak English as an additional language. The project aimed to build relationships between parents, teachers and children as well as developing pupils' self-esteem and skills in speaking and listening, creative writing and drama. Half Moon Young People's Theatre was selected as the creative partner because of its considerable experience working with young people.

During the autumn 2006 term Creative Partnerships coordinator Munah al Bayati, Adam Annand, Associate Director with Half Moon Young People's Theatre and two of the headteachers planned the project. Over 80 pupils from four year 1 classes at Thomas Buxton Infant School and St Anne's RC Primary School worked with two practitioners from Half Moon Young People's Theatre over seven weeks in a process titled *The Mantle of the Expert*² that established pupils as super-helpers in a fictional town, providing fictional clients with advice, help and guidance in solving a series of fictitious problems that might arise in a culturally diverse inner city area. Year 1 pupils also produced work for an exhibition of the super-helper enterprises that was shared across the schools and with parents.

A second strand of the project involved 21 pupils selected from year 5 and 6 classes at St Anne's RC Primary School and Thomas Buxton Junior School, deliberately mixing boys and girls from different classes and different schools to form a theatre company. This group worked daily over two weeks with a writer and director from Half Moon Young People's Theatre as well as year 1 super-helpers to write and devise a piece of theatre which they performed for families and students from all three schools.

Half Moon Young People's Theatre also led two twilight Inset sessions for all Thomas Buxton Infant and Junior School staff and St Anne's RC Primary School staff; the first was a practical introduction to drama techniques that could be used in the classroom and the second was an evaluation session. Staff from the schools visited the Half Moon for a half-day during which they were introduced to the Mantle of the Expert, the story frame for the project and the role of super-helpers, as well as exploring various themes and how they might impact on the teaching environment and the practicalities of the work taking place in the schools.

City and Islington College's performing arts department had completed three Creative Partnerships projects when in 2006 they embarked on *Arrival-Departure*, a more ambitious collaborative site-specific work devised to mark the opening of the college's new Centre for Business, Arts and Technology.

² *The Mantle of the Expert* is a process in which the children play the role of 'experts' in a particular topic. With the support of the teacher or artist they are encouraged to further explore and research that topic within the drama.

As part of its ambition to offer students a progression to higher education and employment in the creative arts, the department has established four performing arts groups: Candid Theatre, See and Eye Music, Raw Skills (boys dance) and Rouge (girls dance). The aspiration is to achieve an identity, long-term sustainability and industry connections for each group. The performing artists or teachers leading the groups recognised that although their creative skills were strong, they lacked experience of strategic planning, fundraising, marketing and publicity.

To maximise the potential of Turbulence, the four groups' collaborative project, the performing arts department formed a partnership with Artsadmin, an organisation that has considerable experience in working with contemporary artists and arts projects. Artsadmin creates, produces, supports and promotes projects locally, nationally and internationally and is committed to work that is innovative, risk-taking and inspiring. The department's aims were for staff to gain additional expertise in strategic planning, fundraising, marketing and publicity to promote its work more effectively; for a small group of students to develop these skills through promoting the performances of Turbulence; and to achieve long-term sustainability for the four performance groups.

Over January, February and March 2007 each group participated in 11 weekly two-hour rehearsals plus two days at half term. In order to market the groups and the performances, each was asked to articulate its aims and objectives and its identity. For the newest, the girls dance group, the name Rouge was arrived at through this process.

The three promenade performances of Turbulence through various locations in the Centre for Business, Arts and Technology were followed by a social event where key invited guests with industry links and potential to provide opportunities for the performance groups were targeted. A ten-minute film of Turbulence was also produced to provide an introduction to the work of the college's performing arts department and the four groups.

Impact and Outcomes

The many partners involved in these three Creative Partnerships projects reflected on the conditions that encourage effective partnership working and the tools necessary to enable it to flourish.

For Amanda Dennison, headteacher at Millennium Primary School, it is essential that a school has a strong ethos of partnership, including with parents, carers and guardians, and ensures that all partners are welcomed with openness and honesty. She believes a clear commitment from senior management and recognition of the benefit of a project encourages it to be valued throughout the school and is necessary for the project to succeed. Teachers need to be involved from the earliest possible stage of a project including those who may not be directly involved; for a school's PE coordinator to be told at short notice that the hall will not be available for two weeks creates a negative environment when a culture of trust amongst school staff is important. As a practitioner working in schools, Tony McTurk of Age Exchange looks for an open, stimulating and supportive environment with the desire to think imaginatively and the determination to make things work for everybody. He feels it can be helpful to provide creative partners working in a school with a proper induction.

Following two years of successful collaborative projects across City and Islington's performing arts department, Creative Partnerships coordinator Rosie Lehan identified the conditions she feels are essential; partners want the work to be good, they trust and are supportive of each other and are hardworking and prepared to give up time to make the partnership work.



Working with a new partner can also require a leap of faith. Introducing Artsadmin as a new partner to City and Islington's well-established partnership presented particular challenges; Artsadmin had not seen any of the department's previous work and as the four performing arts groups were producing a collaborative, devised piece it was difficult to be clear or confident about the nature or quality of the work until very late in the process. Similarly, members of the performing arts team had not had sufficient time to visit Artsadmin's extensive facilities and gain a wider understanding of its work.

Many of those interviewed for the case study commented on how important it was that partners understood, appreciated and respected the others' expertise, their roles, work patterns and the constraints upon them. Creative partners must be willing to listen to a school's needs, understand how it works and the many pressures on its teachers', and schools must recognise that creative partners are not teachers. All partners must be flexible, able to deal with uncertainty and when necessary, willing to change plans. While schools need to think about their creative abilities and focus on processes and not outcomes, creative partners need to empathise and communicate with young people, to enthuse and empower them.



For partners in all three settings, effective planning was highlighted as critical to delivering a successful project. The Creative Partnerships project planning form was cited as providing a useful starting point in the planning process. For creative partners, having sufficient paid planning time is essential; coordinators and teaching staff must also be given time and if necessary provided with staff cover to enable them to plan properly. Joint planning time prior to and during a project is crucial; having it together is often the struggle. It is also important for a school to be clear how flexible it can be, how much it can compromise and in what areas.

Partners also valued having a clearly written statement of a project's shared mission or vision and SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-banded) objectives. At the earliest stage of the planning process partners need to clarify priorities, requirements and expectations, the budget, timeframe and the age range and abilities of participating young people as well as identifying potential health and safety implications.

Creative partners in each of the schools produced plans that set out a framework for the projects. Adam Annand produced a comprehensive project timetable for the Who's Over There? project as Half Moon Young People's Theatre was working with pupils from ten classes across three schools. At Millennium Primary School John Webb and Sarah Davies produced a plan for pupils' involvement including the final performance, and Tony McTurk produced an outline of the workshops with parents and Cloth of Gold.

Nicky Childs from Artsadmin produced a partnership agreement with City and Islington College that reflected her understanding of the project's aims, suggested approaches and clarified Artsadmin's role in the partnership by outlining the six two-hour workshops and one evaluation session that they would deliver, and provided a budget breakdown.

Good communication, both informal and formal, is important as projects progress. Janet Sheehan, headteacher of St Anne's RC Primary School highlighted the value of regular short meetings of partners with action points noted.

Both primary schools and City and Islington College highlighted the value of having an effective project coordinator. City and Islington's temporary Creative Partnerships coordinator Steven Hulme took an overview of the various groups' work, managed and delegated responsibilities and individual tasks and over the twelve-week rehearsal and production period convened regular meetings of the partners, that were minuted. Through the Teacher Artist Partnership Programme, Millennium Primary School coordinator Sarah Davies acquired a good understanding of effective planning for artists and teachers partnerships that were beneficial as the school had three creative partners working with both pupils and adults.

Evaluation by partners at the end of the project is an important final tool in the planning process; useful information can be learned from partners' feedback. Millennium Primary School held an informal evaluation with parents following their two workshops and a final evaluation meeting with partners immediately following the pupils' sharing, while staff from City and Islington College and Artsadmin met some months after the performances of Turbulence.



Conclusion

Partners interviewed for this case study were asked to articulate a definition of good practice in building partnerships. The four primary school headteachers were very clear in their analysis, starting with equality and quality; recognise, respect and trust partners' professionalism and expertise. From the headteachers' perspective, it is important to ensure there is sufficient time allocated for planning, for teachers and artists, with clear learning outcomes; everyone involved needs a clear, shared understanding of a project's purpose that is SMART. Headteachers need to ensure there is good communication throughout the project including time for reflection. While projects need to be well managed, partners should be allowed to take risks and make mistakes, to be flexible and to have the confidence to change things.

Teachers need to 'let children fly with the artist in process and outcomes'. Students' voices should influence process; they need to know why they're doing the project and be encouraged to feel a sense of success. Students understand and value the creative process; the success criteria are very different. It gives them a whole new way of learning and new, transferable skills.

Headteachers should take a positive approach and keep the big picture in mind giving lots of encouragement and supporting open relationships between partners; don't look at problems but at issues and how they can be overcome. Partnerships shouldn't be stressful but about enjoyment.

Educationalists and creative partners were equally positive in describing the outcomes of successful partnerships – for school communities, teachers and artists. For headteacher Amanda Dennison, Creative Partnerships has provided opportunities for the whole school to work successfully together. Partnerships have encouraged skills to be shared and acquired that has ensured the sustainability of projects.

Creative Partnerships coordinator Rosie Lehan defines good practice as the willingness to take risks, to trust, and be excited about each other's work, to remain open by making a commitment to communicate even when things aren't working, and to working hard.

In successful collaborative projects, partners feed on each other's ideas. Jessica Hurst at City and Islington College worked closely with Artsadmin as she teaches BTEC Dance and Performing Arts Business. The partnership has given her skills and experience useful in her teaching, in her work with Rouge and in her own professional dance work. She has become very excited about collaborative work; it's given her a wider vocabulary and more skills in working in other areas of the performing arts. Steven Hulme suggested that Artsadmin's frequent challenging of the college's approach was for him the best thing about the partnership in terms of his learning. The partnership with City and Islington College enabled Nicky Childs from Artsadmin to recognise how important it is to respond to context; the value of contextualising rather than imposing an approach will influence their future work with schools. Similarly, through working with Tony McTurk and David Rowan from Age Exchange, Music Animateur John Webb and Anna Ferrie from Cloth of Gold have gained insights into engaging people through reminiscence work that they can use in their future work.

The schools, college and the creative partners faced particular challenges in developing their projects. For Millennium Primary School, the complexity of working with three creative partners required more planning and project management. For Thomas Buxton Junior School, one creative partner found it challenging to work with pupils from ten classes across three schools and at City and Islington College, Artsadmin had the challenge of engaging in a new relationship with four groups that had a well-established partnership.

The advice that would be given to schools considering or embarking upon a partnership project could be considered in the context of the various stages of a project planning process. It is important to select the right partner; both City and Islington College and Thomas Buxton Junior School interviewed several potential partners in order to make a selection. The choice of artform or artforms to be used is also important depending on the school's objectives. It is a valuable investment to spend time gaining a good understanding of a partner's work.

At the very beginning, clarify what partners want to achieve, starting simply but with scope for development. Be realistic about aims and expectations at every stage of the project; communicate throughout; meet in the middle and at the end and enjoy the partnership; it should be inspiring. Tony McTurk from Age Exchange also suggests 'think imaginatively, be generous with skills and ideas as well as efficient in timing and execution'.

Some of the most successful partnerships have been built over several projects: the partnership between the four performance groups at City and Islington College is one that has developed over several years. John Webb and Sarah Davies first worked together through the Teacher Artist Partnership Programme that they then extended and developed at Millennium Primary School to include Age Exchange and Cloth of Gold, who have expressed interest in working together again. Thomas Buxton Junior School is discussing another project with Half Moon Young Peoples' Theatre and Thomas Buxton Infant School. The enthusiasm of partners to work together again is a testament to the value of good partnerships.

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In October 2008, the three London Creative Partnerships teams (London East and South, London North and London West) joined together to become **A New Direction**, a new independent organisation delivering Creative Partnerships' three new programme strands (Enquiry Schools, Change Schools and Schools of Creativity) in schools across the capital, and extending its reach to 21 London boroughs. The organisation is also looking to develop other strands of work outside of the Creative Partnerships programme. For more information about A New Direction visit the website – www.anewdirection.org.uk

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Creative Partnerships London East and London South were established as two of the first sixteen Creative Partnerships areas in 2002. Delivering programmes with schools in Hackney, Islington, Newham, Tower Hamlets and Greenwich, Lambeth, Lewisham and Southwark, they merged in April 2006 to form one Creative Partnerships area delivering a joint creative programme in those eight boroughs.

The programme placed creativity and imagination at the centre of teaching and learning, working across the whole school curriculum, and exploring different ways of working together and making meaningful change through long-term partnerships between educational institutions and creative individuals and organisations.

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